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WORLD CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS
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CONSIDERATION OF ISSUES RELATING TO THE PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS

Written communication submitted by the Arab Institute of Human Rights

1. The Arab Institute of Human Rights, an independent non-governmental organization established in 1989 by the Arab Organization for Human Rights, the Union of Arab Jurists and the Tunisian League for the Protection of Human Rights, which has the honour to count among its members a representative of the United Nations Centre for Human Rights and a representative of UNESCO, takes pleasure in submitting the following message to the Conference.

2. This message deals with two points, namely, evaluation of the degree of effectiveness of the United Nations human rights strategy and the specific responsibility of States.

3. The evaluation of United Nations strategy, which is one of the principal objectives of the World Conference on Human Rights, implies an assessment of United Nations human rights instruments and the effectiveness of the machinery used to implement them.

4. In our opinion, these various declarations, covenants and conventions are extremely positive. They are the result of sustained efforts made over several decades by representatives of States, experts and representatives of non-governmental organizations, and represent a major achievement for the international community. The Institute would in particular like to single out the role played by the Commission on Human Rights and the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities.

5. The Institute and the African human rights movement hope that the World Conference will confirm and consolidate the two fundamental principles of the universality of human rights, on the one hand, and the complementary nature and in dissociability of civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights, on the other.

6. With regard to implementation machinery, some has demonstrated its effectiveness while other kinds have proved to be rather ineffective. In our opinion, the following are the main reasons for the ineffectiveness, or relative ineffectiveness, of some of this machinery:

(a) The length and complexity of the procedures required to ensure respect for the State sovereignty principle, which is very often exploited to avoid honouring commitments;

(b) The problem of reservations to and the optional nature of the Protocols, since they can emasculate the conventions and sap their effectiveness;

(c) The influence of certain lobbies, that are more concerned with protecting their privileged interests than with human rights procedures and training;

(d) The inadequate financial resources available to the Centre for Human Rights and treaty-monitoring bodies. This problem is a major obstacle and prevents the Centre and these bodies from performing their functions satisfactorily.

7. The Arab Institute of Human Rights therefore expresses the hope that the World Conference will request the United Nations General Assembly to reconsider its financial organization and provide the Centre and human rights bodies with the resources they require.

8. The same problem arises in the case of the specialized agencies, such as UNESCO, UNICEF, WHO, FAO and ILO, which provide mankind in general and the developing countries in particular with outstanding services.

9. It should be stressed that the situation as regards human rights and their erosion is in no way due to United Nations strategy. The main responsibility must be born by States and the authorities responsible for their administration. The Institute hopes that African States will attend the World Conference in force and be able to exert a real influence on the course of events. To do so, however, they must be able to speak credibly about human rights.

11. This means that the following conditions must, in our view, be satisfied:

(a) Accession to United Nations instruments on the protection and promotion of human rights, beginning with the two International Covenants, the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - as only 10 African States have subscribed to that Convention. States must also accede to the Protocols to the General

Conventions and support the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross. It must also be emphasized that, at the very time this meeting is being held, thousands of Africans are dying of hunger and as a result of failure to respect international humanitarian law;

(b) Adaptation of our legislation to international instruments on the protection and promotion of human rights;

(c) At the institutional level:

(i) Legislatures must have real power and be representative - whence the need for democratic and honest elections;

(ii) The judiciary, and especially the criminal and administrative courts, must be independent;

(iii) National institutions for the protection and promotion of human rights must comply with the principles drawn up by the Paris Conference convened by the Centre for Human Rights and officially confirmed by the Commission on Human Rights;

(d) Individual and collective freedoms, and in particular freedom of association, freedom of assembly and freedom of the press, must be protected, so that the various elements comprising society can play their part;

(e) Development plans must, as a matter of priority reflect people's needs and not the improper orders of international financial institutions;

(f) Lastly, a comprehensive plan must be drawn up for disseminating general information about human rights as widely as possible, including human rights education programmes at the primary, secondary and higher levels and in specialized schools. The various media must also be associated with this activity so that citizens can have a clear understanding of their rights and know how to protect and defend them. Without broad dissemination of general information about human rights the foregoing recommendations could well be pointless.

12. The Arab Institute of Human Rights urges representatives of Governments and non-governmental organizations to pay special attention to another international conference, namely, that to be held next March in Montreal, which is uppermost in our thoughts in relation to the dissemination of general human rights information. This Conference, which will deal with human rights, education and democracy, is being organized jointly by UNESCO and the United Nations Centre for Human Rights.

13. Finally, it should be mentioned that the Arab Institute of Human Rights, which UNESCO has just honoured with the International Prize in Human Rights Teaching for 1992, is at the disposal of Governments and non-governmental organizations to provide technical assistance and services with a view to the development of strategies and programmes for the dissemination and teaching of human rights, to the extent that its resources allow.